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ABSTRACT

Minimum standards and basic skills assessment activities at the federal, state, and local school district level, as of September 1977, are summarized, indicating the broad range and variety that exists nationwide. Minimal competency testing is mandated by law in eleven states: California, Colorado, Florida, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Nevada, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oregon, and Virginia. Another ten have experimental or operating programs based on state board or state department of education rulings. They are Arizona, the District of Columbia, Georgia, Idaho, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, Pennsylvania, and Vermont. Programs are in the planning stage in fifteen states: Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware. Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin. Seven of these states--Massachusettes, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Washington--also have legislation pending. In eleven states, minimal competency programs are under study: Alaska, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Rhode Island, and West Virginia. The remaining states--Arkansas, Montana, South Dakota, a continuing process, subject to change and legislative action. Despite difficulties in Montana, South Dakota, defining minimum level, and a concern that levels of proficiency will be set so low that they become worthless, evidence from existing programs indicates that these problems are not insurmountable. Three major measures which are available--the Adult Performance Level Program, the Basic Skills Assessment Program, and the Test of General Educational Development--are briefly described, and 24 bibliographical references are included. (CP)

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An ETS Information Report:

Basic Skills Assessment Around the Nation

BASIC SKILLS ASSESSMENT AROUND THE NATION

Interest in minimal competency testing continues unabated. Spurred by national concern that too many of our high school graduates are seriously deficient in the basics necessary to function as effective and useful citizens, a large number of states are taking steps to require their students to demonstrate mastery of certain academic skills before they can graduate. In some states, legislation has been passed, mandating minimum competency programs at the state and/or local level; in others, the impetus has come from state board of education action, often followed by legislative mandate. In still others, local school districts themselves have taken the initiative, independent of state action, and have launched their own programs to improve student performance.

There are several varieties of minimum competency programs. One is the development of a state-level high school graduation test, requiring school participation (e.g. New York); or a state level high school equivalency test (California, Florida). Another approach calls for local districts to evaluate students' competency in basic skills areas, using its own minimum standards or those set by the state. Competency standards may involve not only high school graduation, but also grade-to-grade promotion.

Having agreed that a high school diploma should mean something more than a recognition of attendance, educators have set out to improve the situation, but do not always agree on the method. Some favor setting a level of minimum competency in reading, math, and language skills at a particular grade level, usually eighth or ninth grade, while others lean in the direction of "survival skills" such as dealing with application forms, driver's licenses, bank statements, and similar items. Some districts incorporate both aspects into their proficiency-based graduation requirements.

Colleges, too, are responding to the current concern over high school students' lack of basic skills. All across the country, college and university graduation requirements relating to writing skills have been tightened and new courses and special programs such as writing labs have been introduced. New techniques for teaching writing have been developed for use by elementary and secondary school teachers. One result of this concentrated focus is that the college student requiring remedial work in writing is probably being better taught than ever before. The effects of efforts to upgrade the basic skills are evident in television also, where a large cooperative effort of 16 states and two Canadian provinces will produce sixty 15-minute programs designed to improve and extend instruction in the essential learning skills. The programs will be available to schools in the United States and Canada beginning in September 1979.

Connected with any competency program is the major difficulty of determining what exactly constitutes a minimum level of competency. How much

should a student master? What constitutes "functional literacy"? How many competencies are enough? These are all questions that educators faced with the task of setting the standards must answer. A related concern is that imposing an arbitrary cut-off will result in too many youngsters failing the test, with the poor and minorities most directly affected. Knowing that intensive remedial instruction is built into minimum competency programs should serve to allay that fear.

Another objection voiced often is that minimum requirements will become the maximum, that levels of proficiency will be set so low that they will become worthless. However, a baseline below which relatively few students would fall, yet still allow students to acquire enough skills to function as citizens, is preferable to the status quo--an unacceptable quality of education. It is reasonable to assume that even modest requirements to begin with will give impetus to more effective teaching.

The difficulties, then, are not insurmountable. There are strong indications that a minimum competency program can, and does, work. One of the first school districts to institute minimum competency testing in recent years, Westside High, Omaha (NE), has graduated its first competency-based senior class. Westside points with pride to the fact that only one percent (eight seniors) of 762 in the senior class did not pass. Most of the eight either didn't take makeup exams after failing them the first time around, or never took them in the first place. The tests were developed by the staff, the students, and parents, and are undergoing further revision. The Denver school system, of course, is a pioneer in the competency testing movement, having administered such a program for about 18 years. Although in the first year of the program the failure rate was over 14 percent, the figure has subsequently been reduced to the present 1.5 percent.

The minimal competency movement is no panacea. But, thoughtfully developed and reasonably applied, a minimal competency program can do much to improve the quality of American education. Given the weight of such a program, a high school diploma would certify that the student possessed the basic skills needed to be a productive adult citizen capable of functioning in a complex society.

This publication is a revised edition of the February, 1977, ETS report on federal, state, and local school district activities relating to minimum standards and basic skills assessment. This update describes activities that are very much part of a continuing process, subject to change and modification. Legislation indicated as being pending may have been signed into law or defeated. With that caution, the information in this report should prove useful as an indication of the broad range and variety of activities related to basic skills occurring at the state and local level across the nation.

ETS Information Division, which compiled this report, acknowledges the provision of invaluable data by Chris Pipho of the Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colorado and by ETS staff in the various regional offices and at The Education Policy Research Institute, Washington, D.C.

Evidence of Widespread Interest in Basic Skills Testing

* A National Commission on Education Statistics survey of state education agencies in August 1976 provided an initial profile of the nature and extent of performance-based activity throughout the country. At that time there were 5 states with operational programs and a total of 29 states involved in some form of performance-based educational activities with emphasis on the basic skills.

  Since that time, the totals have grown. According to a recent Ohio State Department of Education survey, 37 states are now either actively planning or operating minimum competency programs. Twenty-seven of those are planning or operating programs for graduation, 6 for early-leaving options, and 11 for grade-to-grade promotion. Highlights of the summary indicate the following:

  1. Minimum competency programs concentrate on establishing and measuring performance levels in the basic skill areas of reading and mathematics at various grade levels.
  2. Minimum competency levels are set in most states by the state education agency through a consensus of teachers, administrators, board members, and citizens.
  3. In most states, the instruments used to measure student performance are developed or purchased at the district level.
  4. Development of a program may take from three to five years.

* At the National Association for Secondary School Principals/U.S. Office of Education conference on America's Secondary Schools, April 1976, an NASSP task force called for adoption of competence requirements in communication skills, mathematics, and American history as a condition for receiving a high school diploma. There was wide disagreement, however, on how such a requirement was to be implemented. The topic has been getting continued coverage at subsequent meetings.

* A growing number of major professional organizations have selected basic skills or minimal competency testing as themes for their annual programs.

* Many of the leading educational and professional journals have carried articles debating the issue. Recent examples are: Change, November 1976; Legislative Review (published monthly by Education Commission of the States) which monitors legislative developments in the states related to minimal competency testing, among other topics. Phi Delta Kappan (March 1977), and Educational Leadership, April 1977. Major newspapers too, have been covering the issue, as have many of the major national periodicals like Time, Newsweek, and U.S. News and World Report.

* Major conferences are being held: The Education Commission of the States and the National Institute of Education will host four regional workshops on Minimal Competency Testing this fall during September and October in San Francisco, Boston, Denver, and Atlanta. A National Conference on Minimum Competencies was held in New York City on March 4, 1977.

STATE ACTIVITY RELATING TO MINIMUM COMPETENCY PROGRAMS

Note: Activity is state-level, or district-level as defined by the state.

UNDER STUDY	PLANNING	SBE, SDE	L	EXPERIMENTAL OR OPERATING PROGRAMS	SBE, SDE	L
Alaska	Alabama	X		Arizona	X	
Hawaii	Connecticut	X		California		X
Illinois	Delaware	X		Colorado		X
Indiana	Kentucky	X		District of Columbia	X	
Iowa	Massachusetts	X	P	Florida		X
Kansas	Minnesota		P	Georgia	X	
Mississippi	New Mexico	X		Idaho	X	
New Hampshire	North Carolina		X	Louisiana		X
Oklahoma	North Dakota		P	Maine		X
Rhode Island	Ohio	X	P	Maryland		X
West Virginia	South Carolina	X	P	Michigan	X	
	Tennessee	X	P	Missouri	X	
11	Texas	X		Nebraska	X	
	Utah	X		Nevada		X
	Washington		P	New Jersey		X
	Wisconsin	X		New York	X	
Arkansas, Montana, South Dakota and Wyoming have no plans for minimal competency activity.	16			Oregon		X
				Pennsylvania	X	
				Vermont	X	
				Virginia		X
				20		

KEY: L -- legislative action taken
P -- legislation pending
SBE -- state board of education action taken
SDE -- state department of education action taken

Activities at the Federal Level

1. Representative Ronald M. Mottl has introduced two bills, H.R 6088 and H.R. 7116, that would make a minimal competency testing program for high school graduation mandatory for states wanting to receive funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The legislation has since been amended to make the competency testing program voluntary.

2. Assistant Secretary for Education, Mary Berry, on July 14 recommended that her office and the National Institute of Education develop a voluntary standardized national basic skills competency test, measuring reading, writing and arithmetic at various grade levels. The new recommendation was made at a hearing before the Senate education subcommittee, where Senator Claiborne Pell and Admiral Hyman Rickover both expressed strong support of a national standardized test. Rickover has for many years advocated a national test to measure specific minimum competency requirements for various grade levels starting in the early elementary grades. Berry expressed concern, however, that problems connected with such a test exist and must be dealt with.

Activities at the State and Local District Level

ALABAMA

A task force established by the state board of education has been working on recommendations for the total high school program, including competency-based graduation requirements.

ALASKA

Local District
Craig Alternative School is conducting minimal competency activities. North Slope, Galena, Adak, and Southwest Region School Districts are working on designing competency-based curriculums.

ARIZONA

As of January 1, 1976, the state board of education required school districts to certify that 8th grade graduating students are able to read, write, and compute at the 6th grade level. Students graduating from high school must demonstrate proficiency in those skills at the 9th grade level. Assessment procedures are at the discretion of the local districts.

CALIFORNIA

The California High School Proficiency Test, covering the basic skills of reading, math and computation skills, and consumer economics, is administered to 16- and 17-year-olds. Those who pass receive a proficiency certificate legally equivalent to a high school diploma and may leave high school with parent permission. The test is administered three times a year. In 1976, SB 1502, Ch. 315, opened the California High School Proficiency Examinations to any persons 16 years of age or over, or to anyone who has been enrolled in the 10th grade for one or more academic years. In the first year of the test, 12,000 students (out of an eligible 670,000) took the test; 45 percent passed it.

School districts that operate high schools are required to adopt assessable graduation standards of proficiency in the areas of reading, writing, and computation by June 1978, and to assess student progress toward these standards once during grade 7 through 9 and twice between grades 10 and 11. The district must provide, for those students who do not meet district standards, a diagnostic and prescriptive remedial instruction conference or alternative ways of satisfying the district's course of study. After June 1980, students who do not meet these standards will not receive a high school diploma. (AB 3408, September 1976.)

AB 357 would require elementary school districts by June 1, 1979, to adopt standards of proficiency in the basic skills. This bill would have students tested at least twice during the fourth through sixth grades and at least once from sixth through eighth grades. Conferences between pupil/parent/ principal/teachers would be required if the pupil falls short of the standards.

Examples of minimal academic standards for high school graduation have been prepared and distributed by the state board of education, including criteria used for developing the standards for competency in basic skills for the high school proficiency exam. (AB2725, 1976)

Local District

Los Angeles. Beginning in June of 1979, the Los Angeles Unified School District will require its graduating seniors to pass the Senior High Assessment of Reading Proficiency (SHARP) test in order to receive a diploma. Students will have up to four opportunities to pass the test; remedial instruction will be provided. Announcement of the SHARP test by the district has generated considerable interest in other districts.

San Jose USD is working on minimal competency for intermediate schools.

Norwalk-Miranda]
Whittier-Union]
Kern Union HSD]
Newport-Mesa USD]

These districts are working on programs to establish competency graduation requirements.

COLORADO

No special proficiency testing is required by the state beyond regular requirements for graduation from the 12th grade. Local school districts

COLORADO (cont'd)

are free to impose such tests, but if they do so, they must begin assessment in the 9th grade and must provide remediation (under the provisions of SB 180, 1975).

Local District

The Denver Public Schools, as part of the Proficiency and Review Program, administer their own minimum competency tests for high school graduation, have done so since 1960. The tests cover reading, spelling, math, and language mechanics. Remedial instruction is provided for those who do not pass the tests.

CONNECTICUT

In June 1977, a committee appointed by the state department of education made recommendations to the board on developing a high school-equivalent competency-based certificate. Their report recommended that such a certificate be developed, using the APL and GED measures, to include communications skills, computational and life skills, and career readiness. Sixteen-year-olds or older would be allowed to take the test as an early-leaving option, with parent permission. The committee will also study the question of proficiency testing in secondary education as addressed in Public Act 76-405 An Act Concerning Proficiency Examination. A report and recommendations on proficiency testing are expected by June 1978.

DELAWARE

The state department of education is developing a list of general competencies to be used as a prerequisite for high school graduation, as required by the state board of education in its resolution of December 1976. Some exploratory work is being done, using the Adult Performance Level materials. A Commission on the Future of Education in Delaware, appointed by the governor, will review the status of education in the state and provide proposals to the governor for consideration during the 1978 session of the legislature, including recommendations relating to competency-based education. A final report on the commission's findings is due in January 1978.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

A competency-based curriculum has been developed by the superintendent, approved by the board in October 1976, and is being used on an experimental basis in 26 elementary schools. The program includes pre- and post-testing at each grade level. Newly revised board of education rules specify satisfactory achievement of competency at the required skill level for grade promotion.

FLORIDA

CSSB 107 (1976) mandates competency requirements based on mastery of basic skills and functional literacy. Programs of pupil progression based upon performance are required as of July 1, 1977, tied to local goals and objectives. Performance in basic skills will be stressed (on statewide tests) before students may progress from grades 3, 5, 8, and 11.

By the 1978-79 school year, school districts must establish standards for high school graduation, to include mastery of basic skills and satisfactory performance in functional literacy, in addition to the number of credits required by the district school board. Each district is required to provide remediation for students needing it. There are three opportunities in the junior and senior years to pass the functional literacy test, which will be given for the first time in October 1977. Alternative diplomas must be awarded to those students unable to meet the standards prescribed.

Starting in September 1977 on a two-year pilot basis, the GED will be available to students as an early-leaving option, under certain constraints such as parental permission, career planning guidance and counseling sessions.

HB 203 would permit school districts to conduct dismissal hearings for instructional personnel for failure to teach students to reach state minimum performance standards.

Local Districts

Duval County, Jacksonville. High school seniors will take a test of functional literacy.

West Palm Beach. The school board requires all high school juniors to take the Adult Performance Level test. Satisfactory performance on this test will become a graduation requirement, beginning with the class of 1978.

Broward County, Polk County. Both counties are developing K-12 performance standards.

GEORGIA

The state department of education has a statewide criterion-referenced testing program for the 4th, 8th, and 10th grades, with tests for 2nd, 3rd, and 6th grades under development. Results of the tests are being studied to establish cut-off scores for grade-to-grade promotion. The tests, which are diagnostic, provide an individual profile in 20 basic skill areas.

The state board of education has adopted a policy for high school graduation requirements which would include minimal proficiency standards for the life role skills, including specific recommendations for the student as the learner, the individual, the citizen, the consumer, and the producer. Ten schools will take part in the project as a pilot study in 1977-78. The recommendations are modeled after the Oregon high school graduation requirements. Each district must establish performance objectives and develop performance indicators. If the

GEORGIA (cont'd)

pilot project is successful, statewide implementation will take place for 9th grade students in 1979-80.

At the request of the state board, the department of education is conducting a major redesign of the Georgia School Standards, the first such major overhaul since the Standards were first administered.

Local District

Clarke County School District will require proficiency in the basic skills to graduate, beginning with the graduating class of 1980. The school district is exploring the use of a minimum competency requirement for grade-to-grade promotion.

HAWAII

The state department of education is instituting a credit-by-examination program. Course credit will be obtained for mathematics courses by passing an examination; the program will eventually be broadened to include social science and science. A task force appointed by the Office of Instruction is conducting a critical review of graduation requirements and is working on the identification of minimum competencies and the development of a minimum competency test.

Local District

The Kamehameha Schools (private) are conducting a curricular revision study that will investigate minimal competency structures and their influence on actual instructional programs.

IDAHO

In February 1977, the Idaho State Board of Education adopted new graduation requirements, including a provision for a proficiency program, optional to school districts, that measures competency in reading, writing, arithmetic and spelling prior to high school graduation. Participating districts will be required to give the test beginning in the 9th grade and to provide remedial work for those students who do not pass. The first administration of the test will take place in December 1978, followed by another in April 1979. Students in participating districts will graduate with a diploma bearing the state board of education seal. Other students will receive certificates of attendance or a plain diploma. The tests will be developed through the SDE.

ILLINOIS

The department of education is exploring the use of some form of minimum competency testing in basic skills and is considering developing a bank of objectives and items for use by school districts.

Local Districts

Chicago. The Board of Education is working on setting standards for high school graduation. Pilot examinations have been prepared and administered and a study has been done to determine an effective

ILLINOIS (cont'd)

functioning level, involving young adults performing satisfactorily on the job, as a validation effort.

Peoria Public School District is developing a minimum competency examination for high school graduation, beginning with the graduating class of 1979.

INDIANA

A study will be done relating to competency requirements for secondary schools.

Local District

Gary. The board of education has adopted proficiency standards for high school graduation, effective in 1977. Proficiency in the basic skills of writing, reading, math, and oral communication will be required. In the fall of 1976 and in June 1977, Gary high school students wrote essays for the purpose of identifying students needing remedial help in writing. Centralized scoring of these examinations was conducted by Gary teachers with the assistance of Educational Testing Service.

IOWA

SF 252 would require all students to pass tests in reading, writing, and mathematics in order to graduate. The program would begin in July 1980.

Metro High School, Cedar Rapids, is involved in minimal competency activity.

KANSAS

The SBE is making recommendations for proficiency requirements for high school graduation.

KENTUCKY

Interest has been expressed in minimal competency in basic skills as a requirement for high school graduation. The State Board of Education has instructed the State Department of Education to make a study of competency based education and minimal requirements for high school graduation. The use of the GED test for high school equivalency is being investigated.

LOUISIANA

A study of minimum competency testing is being conducted. The Louisiana Program for Educational Accountability (Act 709 of 1976) requires that by January 1, 1977 that the State Board establish "reasonable minimum

LOUISIANA (cont'd)

levels of pupil proficiency in the basic communication and computational skills."

By January 1, 1978 a system of assessment based partly on criterion-referenced tests must be developed in the basic areas of reading, writing and mathematics with possible later addition of other areas. The assessment of reading in grades 4, 8, and 11 must begin by school year 1977-78.

MAINE

LD 1810, the Legislative Act to Establish an Assessment of Student Performance in the Basic Skills: Under the provisions of this legislation, a committee was appointed in August 1977 to study the assessment of basic skills in the state. The Act also requires that all 11th grade students will be tested in the basic use of reading, writing and mathematics and their application to life situations, prior to January 1978. (The testing will take place in November 1977.) A report will be made to the governor and the legislature in February 1978 concerning the outcomes of these activities, with recommendations for policy action at the state level.

A representative sample of 8th grade students will be selected for testing as part of the state assessment of student performance.

MARYLAND

The Athey Bill of 1976 (HB1433) requires that the State Board of Education establish by July 1, 1977 progressively advanced minimum reading levels for grades two through twelve with assessment at grades 3, 7 and 11. In February 1977 the State Department of Education defined the minimum performance levels for grades 1 to 12.

The state department of education has developed the Maryland basic mastery test for reading, administered in 6th, 9th, and 12th grades. This "survival reading test" is also being administered in the fall of each school year to grades 7 and 11 as part of the statewide accountability program. The state board of education and staff of the department of education are in the process of developing a functional mathematics test for 9th graders to be administered statewide starting in the 1978 school year. The test will be pilot-tested with 1,500 ninth graders in various local school systems in October 1977. Those who fail may take the test again in the 10th and 11th grade.

HB 1462 specifies that students in grades three, seven, and nine through eleven (previously two through seven, Athey bill) who have not met "either a minimum grade-level competency or the minimum reading level prescribed by the state board for the previous grade shall be retained in the current grade or enrolled in a reading assistance program."

Project Basic, approved by the State Board of Education in January 1977, establishes minimum competency standards for high school graduation by 1982. The competencies will be established on a common basis all

MARYLAND (cont'd)

across the state, but the means of achieving them will be determined at the local level. Specific minimum competencies are being developed in five areas essential to effective and satisfying adulthood--basic skills, the worlds of work, leisure time, citizenship, and survival skills. Mastery of these will be required of all students as a condition of graduation. The Board calls for adoption of these competencies by June 1982.

MASSACHUSETTS

The Policy Committee on High School Graduation Requirements, established at the request of the Board of Education in 1976, has been working on the development of statewide competency standards for high school graduation and has discussed local and state responsibility for possible implementation of those standards. A status report was presented to the Board in June 1977. Before a statewide competency standards program is enacted, educators and citizens from across the state will review and comment on the Policy Committee's recommendations and will provide input into the final report, due before the Board of Education in June 1978. If the Board approves implementation of statewide competency standards, the program would probably go into effect in September 1979.

Thus far, the Policy Committee's statements include a recommendation that all public school students in the state should demonstrate competency in certain basic skills, including those needed to function effectively as an adult.

HB 3284. The state board of education would develop examinations for testing competency in the areas of mathematics, social studies, science, English/ literature, language, and business. The tests would be reviewed each year and administered at the end of ninth, tenth and eleventh grades. The state board of education would establish passing scores for each test and determine standards for a high school diploma issued by the state.

Local District

Fitchburg. The Fitchburg School Committee has established Project Competency to coordinate assessment of life skills. A skills achievement monitoring system is being used to help teachers keep track of student progress in the basic skills.

MICHIGAN

A criterion-referenced testing program based on competency goals established by the state department of education has been in operation for several years. Students are tested for specific objectives in reading and mathematics in grades 4, 7, and 10. Test results are made available to school districts. The SDE also works with teacher education institutions in preparing teachers to conduct instruction geared to the state's established minimum competency goals. An advisory committee is consider-

MICHIGAN (cont'd)

ing use of a bank of items and objectives in basic skills for local school districts.

The State Board of Education is considering a 12th grade minimal competency test in life skills.

Local Districts

Bellevue Community Schools are exploring development of a basic skills test for 8th graders and for graduating seniors as a requirement for graduation.

In March a committee of the High School Parent Council in East Lansing recommended increased requirements and thorough pre-graduation testing in English, math, science, and social studies. It further recommended a minimum reading level of tenth grade for a diploma.

Lansing School District is working on standards for basic skills and methods of assessment, at junior and high school levels.

Lawton Community Schools are interested in tests for grade-level promotions.

Livonia Public Schools are exploring development of a basic skills test for 8th graders and for graduating seniors as a requirement for graduation.

MINNESOTA

Interest has been expressed in basic skills assessment, especially for grades 1, 3, and 7. Legislation requiring a reading and writing test for grade promotion is being considered. The state board of education has created an advisory committee for revision of minimum standards for education.

Local Districts

Minneapolis. Under the Accountability Project Advisory Board, the Basic Skills Committee reviewed the Minneapolis public schools' instructional programs in the basic skills and made recommendations to the board of education in 1974. These recommendations for basic skills testing form the basis for present interest.

St. Paul. The school board is considering appointing a task force of administrators, teachers, students, and parents to study the feasibility of adopting a competency requirement for high school graduation.

Southeast Free School, Minneapolis, and St. Paul Open School in St. Paul report minimal competency activity.

White Bear Lake has a basic skills requirement for graduation.

The Mid-State Educational Cooperative is developing minimum competency requirements, among them some on the basic skills of reading, writing, math, and life skills.

Pending:

HF 44 would provide that the Commissioner of Education, prior to June 30, 1978, establish desirable minimum standards of reading achievement for pupils completing grades 3, 6, 9, and 12. The bill would also give

MINNESOTA (cont'd)

funding to the state department of education for the development and dissemination of tests and for teachers and consultants.

HF 118 would provide for a statewide program of assessment of minimal competency in reading, math, language arts and other general subject areas. It would also provide for a program of remedial aid for the 25 percent of the students needing it.

MISSISSIPPI

The State Department of Education is studying the question of establishing minimum competency levels in the basic skills for graduation.

Local Districts

De Soto County is interested in developing evaluation instruments for assessment of the basic skills at the secondary level.

Drew School District introduced competency requirements for grade promotion.

MISSOURI

At the request of the state board of education, the department of elementary and secondary education developed the Missouri Basic Essential Skills Test, a competency test to certify a minimum skill level among its high school graduates. Three forms of the test were pilot tested in the spring of 1977 among 8th graders and are ready for use in the 1977 school year. After July 1, 1978 all Missouri public school students will be required to take the test at the end of 8th grade. Students not passing the test will have several opportunities to take it.

The SBE will determine possible use of the test as a condition of high school graduation after the field tests and pilot programs of the test are completed.

New criterion-referenced reading tests will be tested in the 1977-78 school year and will be ready for voluntary use by local districts in the fall of 1978.

NEBRASKA

Elementary and secondary schools are required to establish a minimum performance level in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Schools must readminister tests until mastery at the required level has been demonstrated by all students. An evaluation instrument (the Nebraska Assessment Battery of Essential Learning Skills) is available from the SDE for schools wishing to use it.

Local District

Westside Community Schools (District 66) are currently using an outcome evaluation study with some reference to basic skill areas. The first senior class to take minimum competency tests was graduated in June 1977.

NEVADA

An Advisory Commission for a Competency-Based High School Diploma Program has been advising the SDE in the selection of competency criteria in reading, writing, and arithmetic, since its inception in 1976.

Assembly Bill 400, mandating competency-based testing in Nevada schools, became law July 1, 1977. The Nevada State Board of Education has been working on a Competency-Based High School Diploma Program since January 1976.

The bill requires the testing of students prior to the completion of the third and sixth grades during the 1977 school year. Other dates for standard proficiency examinations are: Grades three, six and nine, 1978-81; and grades three, six, nine and 12, 1981-82 and thereafter.

The State Board of Education has directed the Department of Education staff to complete a detailed analysis of the provisions of A.B. 400 to be reviewed by the Legislative Council Bureau. Department of Education staff will make recommendations in the process of developing minimum competency measurement instruments.

Twelfth-grade students will not be involved until 1982. Minimum competency examinations in arithmetic, reading and writing should be available for use no later than the 1979-80 school year.

NEW JERSEY

A.1736. The original bill, passed in 1975, called for the state to set minimum reading and mathematics standards and for local districts to provide remedial work. Under the amendments, local districts may set lower interim goals and assess students' progress toward those goals. The state board of education adopted regulations requiring local school districts to establish minimum proficiency standards in basic skill areas and provide remediation for children needing it.

An advisory committee is coordinating the activities of eight working committees focusing on key areas involved in the basic skills/minimum standards effort. New minimum basic skills tests in reading and mathematics will be administered to grades 3, 6, 9 and 11 in April of 1978. This program will replace the New Jersey Educational Assessment Program.

A committee created by the State Board of Education is examining current statewide requirements for high school graduation.

Local District

Delaware Valley Regional High School is considering a high school-level basic skills test.

NEW MEXICO

The State Board of Education has approved a plan to use the 200-item Adult Performance Level test at the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades as a high school proficiency exam; state standards will be adopted for the level of proficiency. Rather than having a graduation or no graduation

NEW MEXICO (cont'd)

requirement, at the present time the State Board of Education will use a "diploma endorsement" if the student has completed the proficiencies as specified by the State Department of Education. An essay-writing examination is now being considered that would be evaluated by the instructional staff of each school district. The state task force will assist the LEA's in developing plans to improve teaching of basic skills and to establish various types of developmental and remedial instruction in the minimal essential "survival skill competencies."

NEW YORK

The board of regents approved (May 1976) a resolution establishing the passing of basic competency tests in reading and mathematics as a requirement for receipt of a high school diploma, beginning with the graduating class of June 1979. Students will be tested at the 9th grade level; those passing the test at that point will be considered as having satisfied that portion of the high school graduation requirements.

Three additional tests were incorporated into the graduation requirements effective in June 1980, in the areas of (1) civics and citizenship, (2) practical science, including health and drug education, and (3) writing and language skills. The state has developed a new Basic Competency Test in Writing Skills which all students must pass to obtain a high school diploma.

The new writing skills test was first administered in October 1976, and will be administered again in January and June of 1978. Students who fail the new skills test will be given remedial work.

Local District

Mamaroneck Public Schools are developing criterion-referenced tests to evaluate the effectiveness of the new basic skills programs.

New York City. The Board of Education is developing minimum performance standards. The school system is considering raising the reading requirement for high school graduation from the present 8th grade level to 9th grade. A special pilot program in basic writing skills will begin at the tenth grade level at 15 public high schools and six nonpublic high schools in September 1977. The program, designed to encourage and improve the expository writing skills of the secondary level students, is titled WEDGE (Writing Every Day Generates Excellence).

NORTH CAROLINA

HB 204 and HB205 provide for a minimum competency program, including a high school graduation competency test. HB 204: Tests will be administered to all 11th grade students in the public schools in the 1978-1979 school year, measuring those skills a high school graduate needs to function successfully. 11th grade students who fail to attain the minimum standard required for graduation will be given additional opportunities to take the test in the twelfth grade. HB205: Under

NORTH CAROLINA (cont'd)

provisions of this bill a testing commission will evaluate and recommend a criterion-referenced test to be used in grades 1, 2, 3, 6, and 9.

NORTH DAKOTA

HB 1460 would prescribe high school diplomas and allow diplomas to indicate completion of an optional proficiency test.

OHIO

A Task Force on Minimum Competency Expectations was appointed in April 1977 by Superintendent of Public Instruction Franklin Walter for the purpose of making policy recommendations at the state level, regarding competency-based assessment. Preliminary results will be available in October 1977. The task force completed a major study of competency-based practices in use in other states as well as in the home school districts.

SB170, passed in 1975, mandates assessment (matrix sampling) in the schools, using instruments developed by the state education department. The tests involve reading tests for grades 4, 8, 12, and math and English composition.
HB6, would require that the state administer competency-based tests in grades 3, 6, 9, and 11.

Local Districts
Cincinnati. A citizens' task force is considering basic skills and their assessment. The use of examination for grade-to-grade promotion or at selected points is being considered.
Columbus. The superintendent has proposed basic skills assessment to the school board.
Dayton. A 9th grade testing program is in operation. The school district is working on a basic skills requirement for the 11th and 12th grades.
Mentor Public Schools. The Board of Education has required successful completion of competency exams in the basic skills as a high school graduation requirement.

OKLAHOMA

The state board of education adopted the recommendations of the Committee on Basic Skills and Minimal Competency Testing of the Oklahoma Education Council, to conduct a sample testing in grades 3, 6, and 9 in the basic and survival skills in the fall of 1977, to determine students' basic skills achievement level in the state.

OREGON

The state board of education in 1972 established a new high school graduation policy requiring school districts to ensure that minimum

OREGON (cont'd)

standards in locally defined measurable competencies, in addition to course credit and other requirements, were met by their graduating seniors, beginning with the class of 1978. The 1974 revised "Oregon Minimum Standards for Public Schools" extended the concept of competency-based education to el ementary and junior high schools.

Revisions in 1976 require school districts to verify that students have minimal competencies in the basic skills in order to receive a high school diploma. Districts will assess the reading, writing, and computing skills in three programs of their choice beginning with the class of 1978. Assessments in additional areas, as identified by local districts, will be required by 1981. Districts may choose to use the areas of personal development, social responsibility, and career development, or may develop their own.

An Educational Development Resource Center has been set up to provide districts with assistance in implementing the competency-based requirements.

Local District

Parkrose School District, Portland, reports minimal competency activity.

PENNSYLVANIA

As part of an overall plan to review the quality of education in the state, the state board of education has developed Project 81. Under Project 81, goals of education are being redefined. School programs will be revised to reflect those goals, and new requirements will be set for graduating students. Such requirements will be based on evidence of minimum competencies in basic skills in four life roles, in addition to courses taken, credits, and Carnegie units. Twelve model districts have been selected to work with the state in this effort. Project 81 states that by 1978-79 the model districts will revise graduation requirements and implement a revised assessment program. The state board of education will revise curriculum regulations, based on the work of the 12 model districts and the department of education.

Revisions are being made in the statewide assessment program--an enlarged test for verbal and math areas, and a new test in written expression, with emphasis on reading comprehension and computational and problem-solving areas.

Local District

Lancaster school district has developed an Applied Basic Skills program.

Philadelphia School District administered a test of functional literacy to public high school seniors in October 1976. High school seniors in the district are being required to pass such a test before they can graduate. The board of education plans to test for basic skills. Philadelphia is one of several hundred school districts in the U.S. and Canada working cooperatively on the development of a program for basic skills assessment.

RHODE ISLAND

The Statewide Assessment Program eventually will be based on performance indicators. The state has developed basic skills performance indicators with the expectation that assessment will be devised at the local level. State regulations for the Local Planning Assessment Program (LPAP) are being used on a provisional basis in 1977.

The state is interested in constructing objective-based tests and is exploring the possibility of generating an extensive data bank geared to state instructional objectives relating to basic skills.

Local District.
The Alternative Learning Project in Providence involves minimal competency activity.

SOUTH CAROLINA

The state department of education has been studying the area of competency testing and, in July 1977, the Governor announced the formation of a task force to guide this effort. The State Board of Education has conducted a study which includes a recommendation for a minimal competency level for high school graduates. A legislative committee is looking into the possibility of a state level minimal competency testing program for the state.

TENNESSEE

A proficiency examination for high school graduation was given as a pilot in the spring of 1977 in 27 selected schools; results are being studied. As requested by the state board of education, the Commissioner appointed a group to study the question.

TEXAS

The state board of education adopted, in March 1975, long-range objectives pertaining to "attainment of essential knowledge, skills, and competencies" in reading and math to be required of high school graduates. Minimal reading and math competencies have been formulated by the Texas Education Agency and the 20 regional education service centers, following a series of meetings with lay representatives and educators. Several plans for implementation of a basic skills program will be considered by the state legislature in 1977-78.

UTAH

The state board of education adopted a new policy that requires students to meet minimum standards of achievement including demonstration of competency in some subjects in order to graduate from high school. The revised graduation requirements will take effect no later than with the graduating class of 1980.

VERMONT

In July 1976, the state board of education approved a list of 51 competencies that will be required for a high school diploma beginning with the class of 1981, covering reading, writing, speaking, listening, and mathematics. Testing is not mandated, however. School districts are in the process of implementation. The process of assessment begins in the 1977-78 school year. A Manual of Information and Guidelines for Teachers on Basic Competencies is available from the SDE.

VIRGINIA

The state has mandated minimum competency requirements for several levels and graduation. Under HB 256 (Standards of Quality Act), each school division is to give instructional priority to developing the reading, communications, and mathematics skills of all students, with particular attention to the primary grades (K-3) and the intermediate grades (4-6). Remedial work for low-achieving students will be provided.

By September of 1978, the state board of education, in cooperation with local districts, will be required to establish specific minimum statewide educational objectives and a uniform statewide test in reading, communications and mathematics skills. After July 1, 1978, students will be required to demonstrate basic competency in those skills for high school graduation. Guidelines are being prepared to help school divisions meet the high school graduation competencies. The SDE is developing tests that will be available to the local districts.

A major conference titled "Minimum Requirements for Graduation" was held at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg on October 3 to discuss the topic in general and especially the development of "literacy" in four different areas: (1) communication skills, (2) computational skills, (3) historic-democratic understandings, and (4) postsecondary entry-placement skills.

Local District.

Alexandria School District - The school board has approved a writing program, beginning in September 1977, which calls for specific writing requirements at each grade from first through high school. Greenville County has adopted minimum graduation standards.

WASHINGTON

The question of minimal competency testing is being given consideration by the state department of education.

WEST VIRGINIA

There are no statewide minimum competency requirements but assistance is available from the state in establishing "essential" competencies.

Local District

Kanawha County, Charleston has several committees studying minimal competency issues.

WISCONSIN

State Department of Education. The state superintendent has appointed a "blue ribbon committee" to study minimal standards for local districts and make recommendations on the department of public instruction's role in competency based education.

Local Districts

Manitowoc Public School District has adopted a proficiency testing requirement.

Sparta and Milwaukee schools are also working on minimal competency requirements.

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DESCRIPTIONS OF SOME AVAILABLE MEASURES

Adult Performance Level Program; c1976; Grade 9-Adults; The American College Testing Program (P.O. Box 168, Iowa City, Iowa 52240).

This program is concerned with those coping skills and knowledge areas necessary for an individual's functional competency. The APL Survey is designed to diagnose and evaluate those competencies critical to adult functioning in society. It focuses on the application of basic skills (identification of facts and terms, reading, writing, computation, problem solving) in five content areas (community resources, occupational knowledge, consumer education, health, government, and law). The survey is available in adult and high school forms. In-depth tests in the five content areas are being prepared.

Basic Skills Assessment Program; c1977; Grades 8-12; Educational Testing Service, (Rosedale Road, Princeton, New Jersey 08540).

This program is being developed cooperatively by Educational Testing Service and a consortium of school districts. It is designed to assist the teacher in helping students gain mastery of the basic skills of reading, writing, and mathematics. Secondary schools can use the program to decide whether students have sufficient basic skills mastery to meet the requirements for high school graduation, or in general to be able to cope with the demands of society. The tests are designed to be administered in the 8th or 9th grade to aid in the identification of students who should receive additional instruction in the basic skills.

Secure examinations in reading, mathematics, and writing focus on the application of skills to important real-life situations. An optional direct measure of writing is available with the writing test.

The program became operational in September 1977 and is available to school districts.

Test of General Educational Development; c1944-Present; Adults; American Council on Education (One Dupont Circle, Washington, DC 20036).

The primary aim of the test of GED is to assess the educational development of adults who have not completed their formal high school education. Through achievement of satisfactory scores, adults may earn a high school equivalency certificate, qualify for admission to more advanced education, meet educational requirements for employment or promotion, satisfy educational qualifications for induction into the Armed Services, and meet regulations of state and local boards of licensing examiners for admission to licensing examinations. GED is a battery of five comprehensive examinations: Correctness and Effectiveness of Expression, Interpretation of Reading Materials in the Social Sciences, Interpretation of Reading Materials in the Natural Sciences, Interpretation of Literary Materials, and General Mathematical Ability. Tests are available in English, Spanish, and French.

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